



**Tallahassee
Downtown
Improvement
Authority**

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May 18, 2004

Mr. Benjamin Pingree
Special Projects Coordinator
Leon County Board of County Commissioners
Leon County Courthouse
Tallahassee, Florida 32301

Dear Mr. Pingree:

Re: Response to Investigation into the Tallahassee Downtown
Improvement Authority (TDIA)

The TDIA was formed in 1971 by a special act of the Florida Legislature, was reauthorized by the property owners in a 1997 referendum, and codified by the Florida Legislature in 2002. The organization is a dependent special taxing district encompassing 24 blocks in the central core. Since 1973, the TDIA has been the premier agency charged with planning, directing, funding and implementing downtown improvements. The mission is to develop the downtown area, both aesthetically and economically, as a multi-purpose district comprised of office, government, shopping, cultural, entertainment, residential and related uses, being sensitive to the natural and constructed environment.

The focus over the thirty-one year history of the organization is to build partnerships to facilitate the overall mission, to influence the economic viability of the area, to improve public access to downtown, and to add to the charm of downtown through various programs and projects. These goals are achieved through the powers and functions set out in the enabling legislation authorizing the organization. By serving as a "lightning rod", the TDIA successfully initiates and implements enhancement programs and projects that are visible or underway in downtown Tallahassee, promotes development via private sector investment, and markets and promotes downtown as a regional destination through various media venues. Through ongoing economic analysis and the ability to monitor, evaluate and respond to changes, the TDIA is the premier responsive organization that recommends and implements actions deemed priorities in order to fulfill the shared vision for downtown. Examples of public projects include construction of the first off-street public parking facility, initiation of the Adams Street "Commons" project, Jefferson, Monroe and Pensacola streetscape enhancements, and extensive sidewalk replacement with the "Tallahassee" pattern. Examples of TDIA's role in attracting private development include industrial development

revenue bond financing of Governors Inn and Westcott Station, and recommending creation of the downtown CRA, and initiating concept plans that resulted in successful federal funding of a multi-modal facility to be located at Monroe and Tennessee Streets. The TDIA has an active and on-going business recruitment, retention and expansion initiative, participates in funding the Saturday Downtown Marketplace held in Ponce de Leon Park, and is undertaking the downtown pedestrian connectivity plan. TDIA administers and manages special events, sidewalk café and vendor activities and focuses its marketing, promotion and management activities around the stated goal of “creating an 18 hour downtown, a goal that is reflected in all communications.

Organization

The TDIA Board, an eleven-member group comprised of eight (8) property owner or manager members, and three (3) ex-officio members, a City Commissioner, County Commissioner and the Planning Director, set direction and policy based on the statutory functions and powers. Based on economic conditions and changes, the Board recommends suitable actions to the City Commission for implementation. Over the history of the organization, the City Commission has regularly assigned actions to the TDIA for implementation, such as construction of the Eastside Garage at Calhoun and College. Other assignments include acting as the City’s representative in soliciting a downtown convention hotel, managing the Adams Street “Commons” use, selection and assignment of outdoor vendors, management of the sidewalk café policy.

Partnerships

One of the key functions of the TDIA is to prepare, fund and implement plans for the improvement of the downtown area. Most recently, in 1993, 1998 and 2001, the Authority hosted public meetings, forums and retreats to review, analyze and confirm work priorities. These initiatives resulted in key efforts such as completion of the Downtown Market Analysis for retail and residential development, changes to the downtown development standards to modify height restrictions, business recruitment, retention and expansion, development of concept plans resulting in \$1.6 Congressional appropriation for a multi-modal building at Monroe and Tennessee Streets, and successful pursuit of establishing downtown as part the Community Redevelopment District. Through public participation and TDIA facilitation of such meetings, the result is consensus on actions that mutually benefit downtown and the community.

Economic Viability

As a staunch advocate for the downtown area, the TDIA develops new properties, works to keep established ones and provides funding for qualified projects. For example, the authority acquired and sold the land for development of Highpoint Center, securing the center’s ground floor for retail business use. The TDIA fought to have the Leon County Library built downtown and funded studies that resulted in both City Hall and the Leon County Courthouse remaining downtown. Through the issue of Industrial Development

Revenue Bonds, the TDIA facilitated redevelopment of the Governor's Inn, Governor's Inn Annex and Highpoint Center properties.

Public Access

Making downtown easily accessible and pedestrian friendly attracts more people and improves the economic condition of downtown property owners. The TDIA consistently focuses on improving parking and pedestrian access. Presently, the TDIA leads the initiative to develop a pedestrian "connectivity" plan to further enhance pedestrian access, safety and convenience while also enhancing the economic viability of the area. By adding a parking garage on College Avenue, supporting the development of Kleman Plaza, the TDIA has successfully increased off-street parking options. In addition, Tallahassee has become a national trendsetter for innovative on-street parking solutions by introducing angle parking to a state road through the downtown area. The change resulted in an increase in daytime traffic volume while decreasing vehicle speeds, and reducing accidents.

Charm

Adding to the historical hometown charm of downtown is another key function. Recent and continuing beautification projects include the addition of benches, planters, fountains and trash receptacles alongside downtown streets and parks. The improvements initiated by the TDIA include changes to Monroe Street and Pensacola Street, and proposed changes to Duval and Calhoun Street to enhance pedestrian safety. In addition, the TDIA sponsors and coordinates forty annual Downtown Marketplace events each Saturday March through November, initiated the popular Downtown Getdowns block parties, and works with numerous local and state groups to schedule successful festival and special events within the downtown area.

I hope this general outline of the TDIA activities, goals and mission, clarifies the role the Authority has played and continues to play in the development of downtown Tallahassee.

Sincerely,



Marilyn S. Larson
Executive Director